DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 280 CE 080 045

AUTHOR	Evans, Karen; Rudd, Peter; Behrens, Martina; Kaluza, Jens; Woolley, Claire
TITLE	"Taking Control of Their Lives?" First Findings from a Comparative Study of Personal Agency and Social Structures in Young Adult Transitions in England and the New Germany. Revised Version.
PUB DATE	2000-04-24
NOTE	33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000). Funded by the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council and supported by the National Foundation for Educational Research.
CONTRACT	L134251011
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Development; Developed Nations; *Education Work Relationship; Employment; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Job Satisfaction; Life Events; Life Satisfaction; Personal Autonomy; Quality of Life; Role Perception; *Self Actualization; Self Concept; Self Determination; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Unemployment; *Work Attitudes; *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS	England; Germany

ABSTRACT

A study explored how young adults experience control and exercise personal agency (self-determination) as they pass through periods of transition in education and training, work, unemployment, and in their personal lives. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires administered to at least 100 young adults from universities and companies, and among unemployed young people in each of these three contexts in two localities in Germany and one in England that were experiencing economic transformation. In addition, 21 group interviews were carried out involving 136 participants from these groups. First findings from the study showed that choice and uncertainty can be important dimensions in young adults' biographies in the current moment. Their experiences and actions are not exclusively determined by socializing and structural influences, but also involve elements of subjectivity, choice, and agency. The research is expected to contribute to understanding of the process involved in becoming independent and personally effective in different settings. It is also expected to add to the debate about the most effective ways to support transitions in early adult life. (Contains 19 references.) (KC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 440 280

REVISED VERSION APRIL 24TH 2000

'Taking Control of their Lives? ':

first findings from a comparative study of personal agency and social structures in young adult transitions in England and the new Germany

Karen Evans[1], Peter Rudd[2], Martina Behrens[3],
Jens Kaluza [4], Claire Woolley [5]

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference
New Orleans, April 24th - 28th, 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Correspondence:
Professor Karen Evans
School of Educational Studies,
University of Surrey
Guildford, Surrey, GU2 5XH
United Kingdom
e-mail: k.evans@surrey.ac.uk

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
K Evans
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

[1] University of Surrey, England
[2] National Foundation for Educational Research, England
[3] University of Surrey Research Fellow (Hanover Project)
[4] University of Surrey Research Fellow (Leipzig Project)
[5] University of Surrey Research Fellow (Derby Project)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 080 045

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how young adults experience control and exercise personal agency as they pass through periods of transition in education and training, work, unemployment and in their personal lives in selected localities experiencing economic transformation in England and the new Germany.

Through a combination of questionnaire survey and group interviews the paper reports how, in different ways, choice and uncertainty can be important dimensions in young adults' biographies in the current moment. Their experiences and actions are not exclusively determined by socializing and structural influences, but also involve elements of subjectivity, choice and agency. The research, which is funded by the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council and supported by the National Foundation for Educational Research, will contribute to understanding of the process involved in becoming independent and personally effective in different settings. It also will add to the debate about the most effective ways to support transitions in early adult life.

This paper reports first findings from the questionnaire survey (n=900) and a series of group discussions in the three cities of Derby (England), Hanover (Western Germany) and Leipzig (Eastern Germany).

Background

The question of whether social changes have created a period of extended dependency in young people's transitions is central to the UK Economic and Social Research Council's 'Youth Citizenship and Social Change' Research Programme. This project investigates how young adults experience control and exercise personal agency during periods of transition in education, training, work and unemployment, and in their personal lives. It focuses on three areas experiencing economic transformations in England and the new Germany: Leipzig, Hanover and Derby.

Both England and Germany have new centre-left governments which support the redistribution of power and wealth. They aim to achieve this through new opportunities for individuals to work and learn rather than through traditional policies and mechanisms. This involves structural reform of welfare and social insurance systems combined with a sustained increase in employment. Both governments call for substantial contributions from education and training systems. England is expanding Further and Higher Education and has introduced the 'New Deal' for unemployed people, while Germany has revived the alliance of Federal Government, industrial associations and trade unions.

At the same time governments in both countries call for more individual engagement in society, talking of widening participation and 'helping people to help themselves'.

Faced with accelerating social inequalities and the risk of social exclusion, policy makers are emphasising more equitable access to life chances. At the same time they call for more individual engagement in society, talking of widening participation and 'helping people to help themselves'.

In both countries, there is a need for improved understanding of the interplay of structural forces and individuals' attempts to control their lives and minimise risks, if policies and interventions are to be effective. Nowhere is this more marked than in the young adult life stage. Previous school-to-work transition research has not tackled this age range or, indeed, the bigger picture of the inter-relationship of different aspects of young people's lives.

By investigating the different ways in which choice and uncertainty are experienced and acted upon by young adults, this programme of research explores how young people become independent and effective in different situations and, conversely, how they can become marginalised and socially excluded.

Aims

This paper examines the transitions of three samples of 18-25-year-olds in England and the new 'unified' Germany. Matched questionnaire and interview samples are used so that experiences, attitudes and job aspirations can be directly compared. The project is based on fieldwork with 18-25year-olds in three cities, Derby in England, Hanover in western Germany, Leipzig in eastern Germany.
The aim is to explore the relative contributions of agency (input from young adults themselves on an individual basis) and structure (inputs from organizations at a national and local level, the effects of labour markets, and influences of broad social characteristics such as gender, social class and ethnicity) on the life and work transitions as experienced by these young adults. These are very broad terms and attempts to assess and explain the impact of such influences will inevitably encounter difficulties. Our attempt to do this recognises that these factors are central to many of the debates about the effectiveness of education and the kinds of resources and support needed in early adult life, in Europe and internationally. They link with the issue of young people's degrees of control over their career destinies: in general terms a confident, optimistic young person is more likely to feel in control of his or her transition than a less confident, pessimistic young person. The project is in part an exploration of subjective horizons and levels of optimism, individualism and employment aspirations, and it is these aspects which are addressed in this paper

Recent studies in this field have looked at the ways individuals negotiate and experience structures and opportunities in the early years of adult life. One such study in England was the ESRC 16-19 Initiative, a report of which is published as *Careers and Identities* (Banks et al., 1992). This is an integrated study of young people using a multi-disciplinary approach to map out the 'economic and political socialization' of young adults. Further examples are the Anglo-German Studies, as reported by Bynner & Roberts (1991) in *Youth and Work: Transition to Employment in England and Germany* and Evans & Heinz (Eds) (1994) *Becoming Adults in England and Germany,* which compared career trajectories and institutional structures for transitions in these two countries. Both systems were found to have strengths and weaknesses, but transitions to work in England tended to be 'accelerated', whereas in Germany they were 'extended'. These studies used an innovative methodology of cross-national matched sampling (Evans & Heinz, 1993) These studies

provided much useful statistical evidence and also contributed to the development of a number of conceptual frameworks including the notion of 'career trajectory'. Such trajectories were based on 'broadly similar' routes to employment and had their origins in education, family background and 'the predictability of ultimate destinations in the labour market' (Bynner & Roberts, P. xvi).

Such frameworks rightly emphasized the importance of structures in young people's lives, including dimensions of social class, gender and ethnicity and the influence of economic features such as labour markets and unemployment rates. A number of metaphors have been used to describe such transitions, including niches, pathways, trajectories and navigations (Evans & Furlong, 1996). The recent literature has also introduced conceptions of individualization which suggest that progress through the school to work phase is based on complex interactions of individual agency and structural influences.

The development of the individualization thesis is accredited to a number of German sociologists and the usual starting point is Beck's outline of a new type of society based upon 'reflexive modernization', which he called a Risk Society (Beck, 1992). The notion of a 'risk society' has been applied to the situation of an uncertain and fragmented transition experienced by a young person. Individualization is part of the dissolution of the traditional parameters of industrial society, including class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles: 'These de-traditionalizations happen in a social surge of individualization' (Beck, 1992, p. 87). Within the 'individualized society' the individual must learn 'to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography' (p. 135).

Baethge (1989) took this thesis further by applying it to the situation of youth in industrialized societies. He made reference to 'the disappearance of class-specific socialization structures' and to a new trend towards 'double individualization' (Baethge, 1989, pp. 28-31). The latter trend involved first, the structural disintegration of social classes or strata into 'individualized' sub-groups and, second, the formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) have argued that these accounts of individualisation are based on an epistemological fallacy. The social world has come to be *regarded* as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, while structural forces operate as powerfully as ever, while the chains of human interdependence remain intact.

The underlying aim in the present study is to uncover how young adults experience control and exercise personal agency, exploring the subjectivities associated with choice and determination under differing structural and cultural conditions. What kinds of beliefs and perspectives do people have on their future possibilities? How far do they feel in control of their lives? What is the interplay between these subjectivities and social characteristics of age, gender and social class? The project is contributing to the reconceptualisation of agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, 'informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented towards the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment.' (Emirbayer M and Mische M 1998)

From Abstractions to Lived Realities: A Methodological Problem

The issue of young people's degrees of control over their career destinies is central to much of the literature on the transitions into the labour market and employment. Much hinges upon the significance of individual choice in the transition to work along with the importance and relative influence of national and regional contexts such as the local labour market and structural factors such as gender, ethnicity and class. An important methodological and epistemological discrepancy arises here. This is based around the possibility that there is a tension between an individual young person's response to such questions and evidence provided from broader social and economic trends and patterns. In other words, a young person will typically be optimistic and will say that he or she is in control of his or her life course and that occupational success is largely based on individual effort, whilst there may be a whole mass of data and theory, developed at a national, societal or 'macro' level, which suggests that many young people, especially from particular social groups or 'trajectories', have only limited chances of 'success' (conventionally defined) in the labour market.

This is just a particular manifestation of a classic problem for social and educational researchers: there is a possible discrepancy between individual/subjective viewpoints and larger-scale social and structural patterns and trends. The difficulty for this enquiry can be stated as follows: how can the social research design take account of both the micro and the macro dimensions of complex educational, social and economic processes such as the school-to-work transition and other transitions that are part of early adulthood?

Consequently, as well as the substantive aims outlined above, this study also has the methodological aim of taking the first steps towards the development of a research strategy which can take account of the diversity of individual and structural dimensions affecting people's transitions in early adult life.

It is one thing for academics to write about relatively abstract conceptions of career trajectory, transition behavior and individualization and quite another to draw out empirical evidence relating to these concepts from the experiences and observations of young adults themselves. Researchers need to consider how to faithfully and accurately discover, articulate and map out people's attitudes and beliefs relating to their education, training and career opportunities, and particularly the part these young adults play themselves in creating these opportunities. People in the early years of adult life may not respond particularly well to abstract enquiries about individualization and structures, but may have plenty to say, for example, about 'concrete' aspects of their lives such as type of employment desired, decision making processes in college and beyond, and experiences of work and the labour market.

We need to give consideration to the language used and the methodological stages and procedures required in such research investigations. How are theoretical conceptions of structure and agency to be linked with the 'lived realities' of young adults experiencing the multiple transitions and 'status inconsistencies' in their lives?

Rationale for the Research Methodology

This is an international, collaborative research project. It has extended and built upon the researchers' earlier Anglo-German work by:

- Placing its central focus on the under-researched 18-25 age groups.
- Focusing on feelings of control in transitional experiences, in the inter-related areas on employment and personal transitions.
- Studying new, less- researched geographical areas experiencing economic transformations in England and Germany, including a labour market in Eastern Germany.

It also links with a wider a body of research which has highlighted the complex interplay of broad, socio-economic influences and personal motivation and choice in the earlier stages of life.

Key research questions included:

- Do young adults in Germany, which is generally felt to have more structured transition frameworks, feel less 'in control' than their English counterparts? What are the effects of extended dependency?
- Are there common experiences of class, race or gender influences in the three locations?
- Do individuals in education or work-based schemes feel more in control of their transitions than those in unemployment? How do the responses to this question vary in England and Germany? Do educational contexts encourage stronger feelings of agency than workplace/training settings?
- Are 18-25 year olds less optimistic than 16-19 year olds about their prospects? Does a sense of agency decline as their adult prospects become more obvious?

Standardized sampling and research procedures were used so that findings could be directly compared between countries and different contexts. A structured questionnaire survey was undertaken of at least 100 young adults in each of three contexts – education, work and unemployment in each location. Researchers have gathered further data from a series of group interviews with matched groups of six to eight individuals drawn from the questionnaire samples. Contextual interviews have been carried out with 'key informants' drawn from 'service providers' and adult practitioners throughout the research.

This research has benefitted from links with a concurrent study of young adults' lives in Leipzig. Initial findings from Leipzig (Evans, Behrens and Kaluza 2000) have shown stronger than expected similarities with England related to transition behavior and career patterns. These issues are being further illuminated through the new research.

There were three overlapping 'layers' of research, as follows.

- Information gathering--documentary analysis and the gathering of as much

- Information about the young people, their colleges, workplaces and their contexts as possible.
- Structured questionnaires-administered to samples of approximately 100respondents at each of the settings, producing mainly quantitative data.
- Group interviews-with sub-samples drawn from the questionnaire respondents in each of the two colleges, producing mainly qualitative data.

Thus, in line with attempts to 'deconstruct' the quantitative-qualitative divide (Hammersley, 1992, p. 160), a deliberately pragmatic, multi-method approach was utilized. The research stages listed above were not completely distinct, nor were they carried out in a strict chronological order, rather the whole process was iterative in that one aspect of the research strategy could inform other aspects of data collection.
The methodological stages outlined above were used to work a way into young people's subjective perspectives on transitions and status passages in work, education and their personal lives. The use of both structured and unstructured techniques meant that several different viewpoints (e.g. official, unofficial, institutional, group, individual) were represented and triangulation of methods and of data sources strengthened the validity of the study's findings.
Although the overall research design was based on a multi-method approach, the group interviews were, for a number of reasons given an important place within the overall investigative scheme. First, the technique was innovatory in that it had not been used comparatively in these settings before. Second, because a number of large statistical databases were already in existence, including the Youth Cohort Study in the UK, it was felt that the qualitative data would be particularly useful: they would 'bring the statistical data to life' and illuminate statistical trends developed from the questionnaire survey and other sources. The aim was not to make large-scale generalizations from the interview data, but to use the respondents' comments to provide biographical perspectives which would inform us about the experiences, fears and hopes of these young people. Third, since a 'new vocabulary' in youth transitions was developing, new types of research technique were required to bring out the relevant concepts.

Localities and Samples

Within attempts to document education-to-employment transitions there has been an increasing emphasis on 'area studies' or the comparison of economically and geographically distinct labour markets, the latter usually defined in terms of 'travel-to-work' areas. For example, the Careers and Identities study was based on data collected from four different labour markets in Britain. Similarly, the authors of the Anglo-German Studies, reflecting the 'internationalization' of research in these fields (Roberts, 1995, p. 24), selected samples from two towns in each country paired on the basis of having contracting or expanding labour markets.
The project was influenced by the ESRC 16-19 Initiative and by the Anglo-German Studies not only in the use of 'area studies' but also, as indicated above, in terms of a methodological approach involving qualitative and quantitative 'layers'. However, the

present project differs from these studies in three important respects: first, in its use of an Eastern German labour market; second, in its focus on directly eliciting attitudes to do with structural and individual influences; and finally in its use of group interviews, a technique not to date widely used in educational research until the current 'focus' group upsurge (Lewis, 1992; Denscombe, 1995).

These research participants are critical cases' (Bates, 1993, p. 20) in the sense that they were the very people who should have been experiencing (in England) the effects of policies of vocationalisation along with associated emphasis on learner autonomy and personal independence. Details of the groups featured in the questionnaire phase are shown in Figure 1.

Localities/ towns undergoing economic transformations: Leipzig (eastern Germany), Hanover (western Germany), Derby (England).		
Educational Context	**Work-based Context**	**Unemployment Context**
e.g. University / Higher Education	e.g. Company/ Small enterprises	e.g. unemployment workers centre; Welfare to work scheme; New Deal
Structured questionnaire to at least 100 young adults from each of these three contexts, in each area		
Series of group interviews with matched groups of 6-8 individuals drawn from the Questionnaire samples		

With the cooperation of the College and University Principals, their Heads of Department and the subject tutors, Chambers of Commerce, Labour Administrations and a range of voluntary and community organizations, broad matches based on age group (18-21 and 22-25), gender, types of employment, subjects and programmes were achieved, allowing direct comparisons across the cities and settings. Nine hundred questionnaires were completed; the composition of the samples is set out in Appendix 1.The interview samples were selected from questionnaire respondents who had agreed to be part of the group interviews, with the aim of maximising comparability of the groups. The participants invited were matched by setting, gender and age, as far as possible. The aim was to conduct 18 group interviews: two in each of the three settings in each of the cities, involving in total at least 108 of the survey participants. In practice, 21 interviews were carried out involving 136 participants.[6]
Two or three groups were set up in each setting in each city, each discussion lasting between an hour and an hour and a half. Aspects of the data collected through the questionnaires and the interviews are summarized in the following two sections.

[6] The three interviews were undertaken where it was considered desirable to have additional interview material available because of differences in balance and emphasis and in the conduct of the interviews.

Structural Influences

This section of the paper brings together data which tend to suggest that respondents in the three matched settings had an awareness of the importance of, and were affected by, structural factors such as locality, gender, race, social class and family situation. The following section reports those findings that may provide evidence of an awareness of agency and individual inputs into life and work transitions in early adult life. Of course structural and individual inputs and influences cannot always be clearly separated and despite the thematic distinction made here some of the student comments indicate that both types of influence were simultaneously present in their decision-making processes.

Perceptions of Area/Locality

In choosing an area-based research design, it was our premise that the structural and cultural features of area, city and labour market are likely to impact in important ways on the experiences, perceptions and decisions of young adults. This underpinned our choice of three cities which, although different in size, were undergoing economic transformations and restructuring of traditional industries.

Table 1: Extent of influence of where you live on getting a job?

	Derby				Hanover				Leipzig			
	1	2	3	Tot.	1	2	3	Tot.	1	2	3	Tot.
Big	36	24	37	97	25	34	34	93	48	43	33	124
%				32.3				31.0				41.3
Some	54	51	36	141	63	46	44	153	48	50	46	144
%				47.0				51.0				48.0
Slight	10	24	23	57	12	18	14	44.0	3	7	16	26
%				19.0				14.7				8.7
No answer	0	1	4	5	0	2	8	10.0	1	0	5	6
				1.7				3				2.0
	100	100	100		100	100	100	3	100	100	100	

1=Higher Education Group; 2=Employed Group; 3=Unemployed Group

In this section the emphasis is on 'area' rather than on 'labour market'.[7]
One question asked 'To what extent do you think where you live affects your chances of getting a job?' Responses to this question are set out in Table 1.

Though there is some overlap between the two terms, they rarely coincide exactly. A 'labour market' is usually defined in terms of a 'travel-to-work' area, but the latter is not always easy to identify. The quantitative survey included a number of questions asking how theyoung people felt about their locality and the possible effects of their geographical situation on their job prospects.)

Although only about one third of the whole sample saw area as having a 'big 'influence, more respondents in Leipzig, particularly in the Higher Education and Employment settings, saw area of residence as having a 'big' effect on their employment prospects, with over 40 per cent of respondents choosing this option, as opposed to just over 30 per cent in Derby and Hanover. This may reflect a continuing awareness in the Leipzig group of the dramatically changed labour market situation in which they are operating, ten years after the transition to post-communism.

Gender, Ethnicity and Social Class

Attitudes and beliefs relating to the social dimensions of young people's experiences were elicited systematically through the questionnaire and then explored through the group interviews. One question in the survey asked respondents how important they thought these characteristics (along with family background and qualifications) were in influencing a person's opportunities in life. Important differences between respondents in the English and German samples emerge from Table 2. First, a higher proportion of the German respondents stressed the importance of gender, race and class in influencing life chances. Second, all groups of respondents highlighted the considerable importance of education and qualifications. These points emerged in different ways in the group discussions. It seems that whilst. Both sets of respondents were clearly aware of possible structural influences in the guise of various social characteristics; they placed primary importance on their own educational efforts, perhaps lending provisional support to the individualization thesis.

Table 2. Respondents' opinions on the importance of a variety of social characteristics in affecting a person's opportunities in life (numbers and percentages)

Respondents' opinions on the importance of social characteristics in affecting a person's opportunities in life (n=300 in each city). Numbers responding 'of considerable importance'					
	Sex/gender	**Race**	**Social class**	**Family background**	**Education Qualification**
Derby					
1.Higher Ed	20	24	32	28	87
2.Employed	13	13	21	22	80
3.unemployed	26	29	32	21	77
Total	59	66	85	71	244
%	19.7	22.0	28.3	23.7	81.3
Hannover					
1.Higher Ed	26	45	46	31	97
2.Employed	39	58	42	36	94
3.unemployed	29	52	46	25	90
Total	94	155	134	92	281
%	31.3	51.7	44.7	30.7	93.7
Leipzig					
1.Higher Ed	46	80	58	37	96
2.Employed	37	71	53	25	95
3.unemployed	35	67	57	28	81
Total	94	218	168	90	272
%	39.3	72.7	56.0	30.0	90.7

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It is instructive to compare male and female levels of optimism in terms of job prospects. An initial factor analysis generated a list of 16 tentative factors which are being evaluated and used to formulate further hypotheses (see Appendix 1). Comparison of the factor score means for males and females on the scale 'Negative Future Prospects' has shown females to be significantly more positive in their views of their future prospects than males in the Derby samples, but not in the other areas. This is consistent with findings given in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Expectations of further training, qualifications, employment by sex (percentages)

	Derby		**Hanover**		**Leipzig**	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very likely to obtain additional qualifications	29.5	40.9	40.3	36.6	31.5	35.1
Unlikely or no chance of becoming unemployed	29.5	38.3	23.7	31.1	21.5	23.2
Very or quite likely to train for another occupation	15.7	24.6	8.6	10	12.1	13.9
Very unlikely or no chance of training for another occupation	9.6	3.9	29.5	28	28.2	19.9

More females than males in the Derby sample expected to gain more qualifications, thought it likely that they would train for another occupation and that they were unlikely to become unemployed. Their expectations of these situations were at a higher level than their counterparts in the Hanover and Leipzig samples, and higher than those for males in all cases except expectation of gaining further qualifications, where the Derby females equalled the Hanover males in proportions seeing this as 'very likely'. More females in the Leipzig sample thought it possible that they would train for another occupation than their male counterparts, and more females in Hanover thought it unlikely that they would become unemployed, but generally the female and male levels of expectation were closer in the German samples. In all areas there had been a decline in 'traditional' (mainly male) manufacturing jobs and in 'traditional' apprenticeship schemes. Where the numbers of jobs had expanded, this was usually in the service sector, in the kinds of areas where females were more likely to be employed, such as catering, leisure and office work, though it should be stressed that all cities still had a sizeable manufacturing sector.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Gender in group discussions

Gender issues aroused lively discussions in some groups in all settings, although advantages and disadvantages associated with gender was also considered to be a 'non-issue' in some of the groups, particularly in the Higher Education groups.

The questionnaire data showed that social influences (including gender) were considered to be most important in influencing life chances by the Leipzig respondents, although in all three settings the findings suggested that the overriding influence was perceived to be the possession of educational qualifications. This was rated as 'considerable' in its influence, by the highest proportions.

In both Hanover and Leipzig, the discussions in all groups emphasised the limitations childbearing and child rearing place on women. The German employed groups also concentrated on advantage and disadvantage relative to different professions and occupations. Here the 'advantages' of women in gaining employment female typical occupations were mentioned, alongside references to 'competence' overriding other factors, but within an overall awareness that there are differentials in the levels and status achieved by females and males in employment and the economy.

The following extracts are illustrative of the complex interplay of these perspectives:

Leipzig Employed Group

I; Do you believe you are privileged because of your gender on the apprenticeship and labour market? Or do you believe you are disadvantaged because of your gender?

MH (Male): I hope that I have better chances because I am always told that a man can roll up his sleeves and cannot bear children and if there is child then a mother stays at home when it has fallen ill. Do not get me wrong – I am not of the opinion that a woman belongs behind the hearth, I can cook myself, you know, but I hope that I have better chances than a woman. I know it is not fair to say that so openly here as there are so many women, I mean, ladies present now but in the end it is individual performance that counts anyway.

I: But you do think that you have better chances in your profession being a man?

MH: Yes

MO (Male): In the bank I work for, men are rarely to be found. But the higher the position the more men there are. There is almost a rule behind it. That is the way it works in a bank and I think that there will be any change in the near future. Basically it should be like that, as Matthias has already mentioned, that you get a position because you deliver an excellent performance. Gender should not play a part in it. I think that in a bank or more generally speaking in the whole economy it is important to have social contacts.

With social contacts you get somewhere. Not only in a bank but in the whole economy. And even a woman will get into a high position if there are social contacts she can make use of. To my mind, it is the individual performance that counts. I have not experienced that women have been treated unfairly because of their gender.

PA (Female): I too have experienced that there are differences. Mainly because of my profession, I think as we have been working on building sites, together with industrial painters, floor covering workers but we also need some needlework and things like that. Men do not like to sit down on a sewing machine and doing works like that. Of all the male apprentices there is not one who likes to do that kind of work. On the other hand there are girls who like to work on the building sites and who like to do men's work and where it is possible to say that there are not disadvantages. But there is nevertheless some really hard work that only men can do, like carrying something heavy. Then men have advantages because they can do this kind of work. Women do the easier work and there I notice the difference gender can cause.

In Derby groups one of the liveliest and most extended parts of one of the interviews was about the way in which being female affects their lives. Several issues were discussed. As in the previous interview it is acknowledged that being one of few females in a male dominated work place does mean that you stand out which can incur advantages (you get noticed, you get a bit 'looked after'). Nevertheless, it is their view that in order to gain equal respect it is necessary to prove yourself more as a female.

AB (Female): Well, with me particularly, I mean I'm the only female within probably 200 guys and it's, oh it's, I mean sort of the female/male bit to me is not a problem at all. I mean I'll come out well with whoever, but it probably, in one way it's slightly more difficult for me 'cause I almost have to prove myself, but in another way I get quite a lot of attention because everybody knows who I am and because I'm the only female in that group it's easier, but in the same way it's probably difficult because you feel like you have to prove yourself to be accepted with them.

DN (Female): but prove yourself twice as much I think.

Proving yourself twice as much also came up in the German interviews, from a male in this instance:

Well, I strongly believe that men have a big, fat advantage on the labour market. I very often experienced it myself and I think that not very much did happen with respect to the equality of sexes. Let me put it this way: I have made a lot of observations. I would go that far to claim that what I said applies to all sectors of professional life. There is no equality of sexes. Especially there where I intend to work in the future, women – as is always said- have to work twice as hard as men to be respected to the same degree. I am convinced of that. And they earn less than men for double the work. (male student mechanical engineering, Hanover)

Both AB and DN from Derby said that they had experienced one off incidents of overt sexism and prejudice in the work place. In AB's case, this had been acted on fully by her company. More generally, stereotypes were seen as operating in the way they were treated by other people. A couple of the young women referred to incidents when others had assumed, from looking at them, that they were secretaries.

AB: The amount of times I've walked into an office and I've asked to speak to Mark Bower and they're like "are you the new temp?" and I'm like "no", she says "oh what is it about?" and she's sort of saying and you are? "I'm the engineer in charge of the engine or whatever" and she's like "oh, I, I'm sorry" and she scurries off and comes back and. I mean I've had three or four times and they just immediately presume that "are you the new secretary?", "No!"

CH expressed the view that much of the disparity between the career choices of males and females can be explained by the ways in which they are socialised, and goes on to say: -

I think my god please just don't say child care because you know it just drives me insane the amount of girls, because they think that's the only thing they can do. And because their mum's got a young kid and its 'oh I like babies' you know, I think oh please, you know. And I think there's something fundamental within everything that, that I think you get to a certain age where you think to yourself hang on a minute, you know, this isn't all I can do and there's lots of other things that I can do and that's why it's refreshing to hear someone like you who's an engineer who, personally when I go to Rolls Royce I think my god if I'd my time again I'd be an engineer. You know, my god!

In all three areas, there was discussion in the groups of difficulties encountered when trying to gain work in areas traditionally dominated by the opposite sex (eg females in construction, males in caring). This was particularly apparent in the unemployed groups in Derby and in the employed groups in Hanover and Leipzig

LS (Female) Can I just say I, I'm working from a different side of it because I do a construction course at college, I do brick laying, plumbing, joinery, I do it all at college and I get, I get the piss took out of me. All the lads that are there just do not accept us. There's one tutor there, his name's Fred, and he doesn't accept us and he told us what he thought of us, there's 13 of us women, we've been in the paper and that.... So, from my point of view they are sexist in some things because if I went to get a job on a building site, and a man did, and we both had exactly the same papers, they're gonna give that job to a man. I know they are.

ZN (Female) Well, working with wood, isn't it; it's traditionally a man's trade isn't it? So, French polishing, you know restoration is traditionally a man's trade. I was fortunate to find a female employer. So..Because if I'd 'ave 'ad a bloke employer then it would have been slightly different, definitely.

JN (Male) .....last, last year I was on, I was doing a course at college, childcare, and I was OK, on the course I was doing the course work OK. But when the placements came up I was sent to a place where I was supposed to do evaluations on the kids and things like that and the teacher there didn't give me enough time to, well didn't give me any time at all to do the course work and the placement. But I had to leave college eventually because I was two months behind on work and I didn't have any time in the placement to do any, to do any of the work.

SC (Male): Yes, I used to want to work with kids actually work with like children. And I mean I went to one job and they gave the job to a girl who had just left school with a GCSE, yet I had proper qualifications from college, you know they said, they gave her the job. So where does that come in it? She's got that basic GCSE and that's it, yet I've spent two years at college, got the proper qualification, know exactly what I'm doing, I've first aid and all sorts. So there was no reason why I couldn't do the job it's just that they didn't want you to do it.

The members of these discussion groups had similar attitudes towards racism and racial discrimination. However, they had rather less to say on these topics and gave fewer examples: except in Leipzig, where issues of 'nationality' arouse strong feelings and are reflective to some degree of concerns about the 'xenophobia' reported in recent press coverage of developments in the Eastern part of Germany. These data are under current analysis and will not be reported here. Similarly, discussion of social background is influenced by different meanings in Germany, particularly in Leipzig where class pride (for manual workers and farmers) in the GDR was replaced by class-based disadvantage for the former at least. . The interview approach aimed to get insights into this is various ways, through the questions which asked about influences of family background, obstacles, both material and social, through open questions about the factors which affect and influence occupational destinations and 'career'. Social class awareness is shown to be mixed in with family and gender dimensions in complex ways, with much reference throughout the interviews to the importance of 'social connections' and the invisible social factors, beyond qualification and competence, which affect success.

In general the interviewees in Derby were asked more directly about the concept of social class. The views expressed varied distinctly between settings. Those in employment discussed social class as 'meaningless now', while unemployed groups emphasised the difference social class makes. ' Yes, it makes a massive difference, or at least the kind of area you live in (posh or rough) makes the difference.' The survey findings showed that fewer Derby respondents perceived effects of social class as influential in their life chances than their German counterparts. Further analysis is being undertaken of these data at the time of writing.

Family Background and Peer Group Influences

About 40 per cent of the research participants reported that they had permanently left their parents' home. Slightly more of the Derby respondents sample had left home, when compared with their Hanover and Leipzig counterparts.

The overall impression, derived from both types of data, was that the relationships between these research participants and their families tended to be based on support and encouragement, usually without too much pressure on them to follow particular pathways. The interviews revealed many ways in which influences, often of a socially reproductive kind, are present in shaping horizons and dispositions as well as help with 'contacts' of various kinds. Many respondents expressed a view that whilst parents would often advise and encourage they were never forcibly pushed in a particular direction.
It has already been shown (Table 3) that less than one-third of the respondents from all three areas felt that family background (as distinct from social class) was important when looking for a job. It would seem that families do have considerable influence, but often an indirect one. This suits the young people at a time when they are striving to establish their own adult identity and commensurate levels of independence. Support from the family is usually there if they need it, but at the same time they feel they have freedom to 'make their own way' and felt that their educational and occupational destinations were under their own control.

I: Do you live this process with a feeling of independence?

S (female): yes, I do. As I said before, my parents did not interfere while I was trying to find out what I wanted to do in the future. I informed myself about all the possibilities, which by the way are very plentiful, and it finally turned out that I preferred to work as a computer specialist. I learned about the future possibilities in this field but also about the earnings and where you can apply later on and things like that.

I: Who is the most important advisor for you, in other words, how big is the influence of others on your lives?

Y (female): I try to decide on my own. Once in a while I take advice from others but not necessarily from my parents. The one who helps me in finding a solution is my older sister. I ask her sometimes "what have you done in this situation?" or "Could you help me?" but basically, I try to decide on my own.

Others perceived more subtle dimensions, when asked about how far their decisions were influenced by parents, as the following sequence of points from one of the Hanover groups illustrates:

M: No, not anymore. The first thing I decided, that is, without my parents, was the course of study and whether to study at all. I simply do not ask them to give my advice. I do not want it either. If I really need advice I have girlfriends to turn to. They probably know better than my parents. For my parents I am still a child, I think. But that is not what I want. I want to be given advice by people of my own age, from adults.

N: Well, in the sense of 'as long as you take money from us you ought to do this or that...' I would say no. On the other hand, I cannot shield myself from it completely, that is correct. I think there are influential factors that are very subtle, and I can feel as independent as I want-they are there. Sometimes there are situations where I say to myself 'I think you let yourself be influenced by other people'

St: But to be influenced by someone need not necessarily be something bad. It starts with you reporting something at home and your parents react to it. That already influences the making of decisions.

N: Yes, for sure. It can be something positive because they know you in and out.

Others distinguished between small and bigger decisions:

There are smaller and bigger decisions. Smaller decisions are made by oneself. It is a different thing with those bigger, more important decisions, for example when you wish to move out and are still living with your parents. Okay, you make the decision on your own but you talk to your parents about it. Another example is about buying a car. With a big decision like this, there is a fear that you could make the wrong decision. So you go and ask for your parents' or your friends' advice who know something about your problem.

Agency: Making Your Own Decisions

Very often the research participants asserted their individuality and talked in terms of making their own decisions, independent of the family, the peer group and other structural influences. This section brings together some of the questionnaire findings and interview data which provide support for notions of individual agency. Agency here refers to those aspects of the decision-making process which were predominantly individual, creative, pro-active and involved resisting external pressures. Specific questions on individuality, self-confidence, responsibility and independence were used to try to bring out perspectives on these issues. In addition levels of optimism/pessimism were considered on the basis that if these young adults were generally optimistic, then they must possess a degree of expectation that they can overcome negative structural factors such as local unemployment rates and the impact of various forms of discrimination.

Finding a job: Individual effort and 'luck'

One question, asked 'when it comes down to finding a job, to what extent does success depend upon the individual?' Responses to this question are presented in Table 5. It can be seen that many more of the Derby respondents indicated that they felt that finding a job was 'mainly' down to the individual', 37.7 per cent compared to 25 per cent in Hanover and only 17.3 per cent in Leipzig. While the majority of respondents see finding a job as equally dependent upon the area and the individual in all three areas, the percentage attributing labour market success to area as much as individual rises to 72.3 per cent in

Leipzig. Despite an unemployment rate as high as 18 per cent in Leipzig, only a few Leipzig respondents see the area features as primary determinants of success in finding a job, in common with the other cities. When analysed by setting, however, it can be seen that the Derby respondents in the unemployed group, were comparable in their attributions to the German samples. In other words, it was the respondents in the employment and higher education settings in Derby who were twice as likely as their German counterparts to attribute success in finding a job mainly to the individual rather than a balance of area and individual features.

Table 4. Opinions on the extent to which success in finding a job depends upon the individual, the area or a combination of both (numbers and percentages)

Finding job depends upon...?												
	Derby				Hanover				Leipzig			
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total
Individual	42	44	27	113	22	32	21	75	15	19	18	52
%				37.7				25				17.3
Area	10	4	4	18	4	5	11	20	6	3	7	16
%				6				6.7				5.3
Both	45	51	67	163	72	61	54	187	75	76	66	217
%				54.3				62.3				72.3
No answer	3	1	2	6	2	2	14	18	4	2	9	15
				2				6				5
Col Total	100	100	100	300	100	100	100	300	100	100	100	300

1=Higher Education; 2=Employed; 3=Unemployed

The importance of individual characteristics, and 'luck'

The question on whether 'talent always rises to the top' produced, in all areas and groups, responses which emphasised the interplay of talent with 'diligence' and what you do with it, the environment in which you operate, and factors which influence whether talent is recognised or not. Talent was not seen as decisive. Social connections were mentioned by most groups and 'luck' was particularly emphasised in some interviews, with reference to employment chances being like 'throwing a dice'. . The discussion of the unemployed group in Hanover revealed the interplay of perceived factors:

A: (Qualifications) are not only important for the job market. They are generally important to survive. I believe that if you do not continue your education throughout your professional life, one day you will not be qualified anymore for your job as demands increase. If you stay on your educational level....

F: In particular, specialised qualifications are in demand in enterprises. The more specialised your knowledge, the better your chances on the job market.

I: The questionnaires... have showed us that the majority of those asked believe that talent is a decisive factor for your professional success. Do you agree?

A: By any means, talent is a huge advantage for the person to whom it was given. The person is almost invincible if the talent is combined with knowledge.

K: Depends on where you are working, that is in what company and whether you have the chance actually to use your talent.

C: Not only talent is an important factor for professional success, but also luck.

A: You need luck wherever you go and whatever you do.

K: For example, you can be very talented regarded the speaking of languages but it is useless, if you do not have the opportunity to use it, say in an office. But for working in an office you need office qualifications, too, not only the qualification to be able to speak a foreign language.

J: Sometimes you are not given the chance What I mean is, there are some very talented singers who do not get the chance to show their talent. Consequently they do not get the chance to be a big money earning superstar

A: That is what I meant when I said that luck matters as well.

F: To be in the right place at the right time. That is important too.

The Importance of Qualifications

It has already been shown (in Table 3)-that large majorities of all three samples saw educational qualifications as important when it came to looking for-employment. It is evident that a large majority of respondents in each of the three samples saw education/qualifications as of 'considerable' importance in influencing opportunities in life. Of course the type of education received and the level of qualifications obtained depend upon a whole complex of structural factors as well as on individual effort. Home background, social class, gender, ethnicity, quality of teaching, locality and a host of other factors have been shown to have at least some influence on educational achievement. However, in written responses and in the follow-up group discussions these young adults stressed again and again the importance of individual effort. The need to work hard for qualifications was a prominent topic in the group interviews. The opening passage of the interview above is one illustration of this. There were strong suggestions that these young adults generally believed in the idea of a 'meritocracy' and that if you 'failed' (in terms of obtaining qualifications) then this was probably your own fault and down to a lack of effort and determination.

Levels of Optimism

The belief in the importance of individual effort was found, in previous work, to be accompanied by a degree of optimism in relation to their own prospects, whatever the state of their local labour market: this was one of the most interesting (and in some ways perplexing) findings of the earlier research. We asked whether this optimism would decline in older age ranges as the realities of the labour market and other constraints were experienced more directly. Optimism was again prevalent in responses to a number a questions on prospects of employment and unemployment. One question in the present study asked respondents how confident they were about avoiding unemployment. The findings arising from this question (Table 8) also support this view of young people as generally optimistic, whatever their locality. In the older age groups, this optimism was maintained. On a preliminary analysis comparing mean factor scores for the factor 'NEGATIVE VIEW OF PROSPECTS' there are no significant differences by age, between the younger (18-21s) and older (22-25s) in any of the settings or areas. It is interesting here to compare these first findings with the findings of previous studies which showed that younger people (16-19) in the depressed labour market with higher than average unemployment rates, were at least as optimistic as their counterparts in more depressed areas. In comparisons between areas, however, the results suggest that negative views of prospects do begin to bite in the more economically depressed areas, in the 18-25 age range.

Self-confidence, Independence and Taking on Responsibilities
Hanover Group

E: Now, I think that I can claim to be quite self-confident. Nonetheless, I always try to keep it to a moderate level. It would be wrong to seem arrogant to people. I want to find my strengths, which I do – especially in my study, and let them grow but on the other hand, I feel the need to scrutinize myself closely, that is, either doing it by myself or let others do it. That is my aim.

R:I just thought about something you mentioned: reflection. I think that I am not very self-confident in some situations. Especially when they are new and unknown to me. My life, however, ...I know a lot of my strengths and weaknesses, if one can put it like that. I can assess myself well. I love to reflect on things. And that is how I would define "self-confidence". When I experience myself on some situation where I am insecure, then it is easier for me to understand myself.

The respondents' levels of self-confidence in relation to employment issues supported the suggestion that they experienced significant degrees of independence in their decision-making processes. Approximately half of the samples felt that their present position was a result of their own plans, with chance being the second biggest perceived influence, followed by social connections.

Table 5. Types of responsibility experienced 'often' in different setting (percentages, both samples)

	Higher Education			Employment			Unemployment		
	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig
	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W
Feel given responsibility	31/57	65/47	62/37	31/59	71/57	65/57	22/35	59/39	66/33
Set own goals	48/48	82/50	86/59	63/50	85/50	84/42	43/33	63/35	69/18
Feel stretched	27/49	54/54	54/74	26/44	55/62	56/53	27/23	47/35	52/29
Make decisions	78/68	45/56	93/50	93/67	92/47	92/42	70/45	75/29	79/26
Have chance to use initiative	52/52	65/39	70/42	66/64	68/45	64/48	47/28	62/35	59/33
Feel sense of achievement	31/29	72/47	76/79	31/42	77/57	78/80	64/39	64/39	66/45

OW=outside work, study or training; W= in work, study or training

In our previous studies, respondents had indicated that they felt they had skills which had 'not been recognized in formal qualifications' and took the trouble to list these skills. Examples given included technical skills, dealing with people, charity work, sporting skills and musical or artistic abilities, Rudd and Evans (1998); Evans and Heinz (1994)
The respondents were also asked how often they had experienced a range of different 'responsibilities' in their different settings, and in their lives 'outside' work, training schemes or HE. The findings are shown in Table 5. The results are dramatically different from those obtained with 16-19 year old respondents in our first study of Youth and Work in England and Germany. That first study suggested that young Britons felt more stretched, challenged and had more exposure to work-related responsibilities than their German counterparts at that age. We observed that this needed re-testing with an older age range as we expected that this was a reflection of the accelerated transitions into the labour market, with earlier exposure to these experiences. We noted that it was probable that young Germans, with longer periods of work preparation with trainee/student status, would experience these responsibilities later and possibly at a higher level. (Evans and Heinz 1994)

For those who were in Higher Education, our findings here show that reported initiative, decisions and responsibility are again higher among the Derby respondents, while experiences of sense of achievement, feeling stretched are markedly lower than those reported by German respondents in Higher Education, particularly in the Leipzig samples.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In the work settings, sense of achievement and feelings of being stretched appears to be experienced less often by Derby respondents in comparison with their German counterparts, particularly in Leipzig, while feelings of being given responsibility were comparable. Initiative and decision-making appear to be frequently experienced by more of the Derby samples than their German counterparts. The unemployed groups reported lower frequencies of these experiences than the employed and higher education groups, with sense of achievement highest in the Leipzig sample.

What is more remarkable in the table of findings (Table 5) is the comparison of experiences of responsibility and achievement outside the work or training environment. While Higher Education students in the three cities feel more stretched by their studies than by their life outside, in all other respects their life outside gives more scope for the exercise of responsibility and initiative. In the employed groups, the overall picture of German respondents is one of lives outside work offering at least as much if not more of these experiences than life at work, while among Derby respondents the data suggest that most experiences of responsibility arise from work. The unemployed groups appear to be reporting much richer experiences outside their schemes than on all items except feelings of being given responsibility, which was higher in work than outside it in the Derby respondents only.

One of the major first findings of this study has been that the young people featured here have, on the whole, maintained high levels of optimism, in terms of job aspirations, along with a sense of personal independence. Similar levels of optimism existed in the three localities despite the differences in their unemployment rates and in their short- to medium-term economic prospects. In previous research, whether they lived in a 'depressed' East London borough or in a buoyant labour market in the South-West of England ('M4 corridor') young people in the 16-19 age group were primarily optimistic, at the individual level, about their job prospects, and were largely of the opinion that they had a considerable degree of 'control' over their transition to work. We asked whether 18-25 year olds in our new study would lose this optimism on coming up against the realities of the labour market.

Hanover Unemployed Group

G: *I am not sure. I do not know what the future will bring*

A: *The future is what will come your way.*

G: *I know but that is what I do not know, you see?*

K: *But you alone are responsible for your future, nobody else is.*

G: *Somehow you are right but I do not know what the others will do. I have to think of them too.*

K: *Okay. But to some very high degree your life is in your own hands.*

A: *Depends how you look at it. It is your attitude. You have your goals. He has none. He lets everything come his way, like destiny.*

G: *I do have my goals and I will try to attain them.. what I do not know, however, is whether I will really reach them or not.*

F: *That is up to you.*

J: *Not always. What if you get health problems or....*

I: I would like everyone to answer this question.

F: *I think my future prospects are fine. So far there are no bad signs that I will end up being homeless. I do not think so. There are always preventative measures that I can take in order to keep my standard of living.*

H: *I am also positive about my future. I think if you have realistic aims, then you will reach them.*

I: What do mean - realistic aims?

H: *These are goals, maybe wishes, which I can really reach and fulfil. You never know when this will be but you give your best to reach whenever it will be.*

J: *Goals are realistic when you have good chances to attain them. You are right – you never know when this will be.*

K: *You should go for a goal, maybe in a time frame. There is no use in planning to become a graduate in business management when there is no time limit. Maybe when you're thirty you will remember what your plan had been but then it might be too late. The more precise this time frame is the more "self-made" pressure you will feel which can be important to move on. In short: you need a time limit and you need to work on attaining your goal. I believe that success is based on consequent acting. You will improve and be successful if you confront yourself with yourself.*

The initial analysis suggests that levels of optimism are tempered with greater realism and an appreciation that there may be setbacks, with increasing age and experience in the labour market. The overriding perspectives, however, are those of the future being in one's own hands, and while setbacks will be encountered, it is down to the individual to find ways to cope and overcome them.

This is an important finding with significant theoretical implications and explanations are needed as to (1) why reasonably high levels of optimism were maintained even where there were difficulties in finding suitable jobs in these areas; and (2) why the respondents, who

were by all accounts in difficult employment situations at the time of the fieldwork, continued to see the problems and the solutions as lying with the individual. Several possible explanations, taken from a range of different subject disciplines, are considered briefly in this section.

One possible explanation from the pilot work in England was that these young people were optimistic because they had been 'socialized into' a belief in choice. A decade or more of 'enterprise culture' has led the majority of the Further Education students in the pilot sample to believe that there are employment opportunities available and that they will succeed if they make the individual effort required. This approach can be associated with the view of a ladder of opportunity' and the notion of a 'meritocracy'. In some senses, if this explanation is correct, then the ideological aspects of the new vocationalism of the early 1990s, based on 'enterprise culture', have successfully been transmitted to this cohort of young people. Whether this is desirable or not is a separate issue. Certainly, it is no good believing in choice while at college and then finding out after you have left that your options and opportunities are severely limited because of high levels of unemployment and a depressed local economy.

Some of the research participants' viewpoints in all areas could certainly be described as individualist, but they were not promulgating an 'ideology of individualism'. Their comments about 'luck' and 'effort' should not be taken in isolation, but need to be complemented with their questionnaire responses and discussions concerning race, sex and area influences. The fact that they put their own success or failure down to themselves as individuals does not mean that they believe in a culture or a system based on individual effort alone, nor does it mean that they are unaware of the structures operating upon their age group's economic opportunities. But these influences were perceived much less strongly in Derby than in the German samples, and most strongly of all in Leipzig, where the political changes have rendered structural influences much more visible and amenable to comparison.

There is also some evidence that a kind of change process in expectations takes place in the older age groups. Some reported that they had changed their job aims, since leaving school, which could contribute to an explanation for the maintenance of optimism despite labour market difficulties-horizons had been adjusted. Others had had no clear previous aims and were apparently adjusting their expectations as they went along.

Another relevant factor may be the importance young people placed upon their social and leisure contexts, as well as upon their job aspirations. These young adults may have been confident partially because of the existence of social support networks provided by friends, peers and family members. Training activities and the young person's social life often overlapped. This was less the case with those in employment. Some young people's levels of social confidence may have overlapped with or boosted occupational expectations. Many of these young people were confident in general, not just in terms of skills developed and qualifications gained.

A third type of explanation might take this point further and attribute the respondents' levels of optimism and confidence to the psychological attributes associated with this age group. At this age and in these circumstances young people had to have reasonable levels of confidence and high expectations: not to have taken this view would have been an admission of personal failure. An individual entering the labour market and in the process of establishing him or herself (for a 'period of 40 years or more) is bound to be hopeful and

expectant. Additionally, group dynamics may have been operating in the interview sessions: it is possible that an admission of a strong possibility of unemployment is less likely within a group than in a one-to-one situation.
Those with more experience of the labour market were as optimistic and confident in their responses, but often more measured in recognising constraints and factors beyond their control. Also these young people were experiencing the rights and responsibilities of adulthood and made frequent reference to the new manifestations of adulthood in what was for many a relatively exciting phase of their lives, despite setbacks and problems encountered.
Furnham, in a review of the literature on youth unemployment, has shown how a psychological approach may help to explain these types of outlook. Attributions about getting a job are frequently internal (i.e. to personal qualities and abilities) rather than external (e.g. to environmental or structural factors):
Confidence, perseverance and qualifications were all considered to be primary factors responsible for success in finding employment. 'Yet failure to get a job was rarely attributed to the personal shortcomings of the job-seeker himself. Thus, these results tended to support the well-established, attributional finding that success is attributed to internal factors and failure to external factors. (Furnham, 1991, p. 138)

This kind of finding 'fits' well with the comments and answers given. Many did attribute success to individual effort and levels of qualifications, while at the same time expressing the opinion, for example, that an unemployed person was not really to blame for his or her situation.
Interestingly, the view it seems that the view we found in younger age groups in England that 'unemployment was something that happened to somebody else' has disappeared in this study. The majority think it at least possible that they will face and experience employment in the future, in all groups.
This leads on to a geographical explanation of these students' expectations. All sets of respondents lived in predominantly urban areas with a large labour market (but also with a large labour supply). While the hunt for work would undoubtedly be competitive, at least there were vacancies to be aimed for and these could be in a diversity of occupational areas. In Leipzig, which has the highest level of unemployment, one explanation of the reasonably optimistic responses is that the raft of special schemes and programmes introduced by the German Government is perceived as a kind of 'second' labour market by the inhabitants, for whom state provision is seen as a norm. In this respect it was not unnatural that these young adults should have reasonably high expectations. The existence of 'dead end' training schemes and low-paid, low-status jobs was less obvious in these three urban areas than would have been the case in a rural labour market. In a village, with a restricted travel-to-work area and an agricultural hinterland, the limitations of local job opportunities, unless you are prepared to move away, are obvious for all to see. In England, this type of explanation has been used by Church and Ainley to explain continued high levels of job aspirations in East London despite increasing unemployment levels. One explanatory factor for this situation, according to Church and Ainley, was that although the docklands labour market was very depressed 'the City and the West End of London represent relatively buoyant labour markets compared to other urban areas and the

perceived, but not necessarily real, job opportunities in these areas... maintain the aspirations of some interviewees' (Church & Ainley, 1987, p. 83).

Theoretical and Policy Implications

The research participants conveyed a general sense of satisfaction with most aspects of their lives and had developed certain levels of confidence and optimism about their educational achievements and employment experiences to date.
In terms of theory, whilst structures, including the 'big four' of social class, gender, race and locality, have a crucial influence, not enough has yet been done to deconstruct individualized aspects of youth transitions. The fact is that between the late teens and mid-twenties people are making choices every day and some of these choices will significantly affect their educational and employment careers. Most young people operate at a relatively optimistic and self-confident level and enjoy the degree of freedom they perceive themselves to have to make decisions relating to work, education, lifestyle, relationships and other important areas of their lives. The almost deterministic macro-sociological interpretation of 'propulsion' into career trajectories and their associated occupational outcomes, with very little control over these processes, involves a rather minimalist view of the input which people can put into these processes.
These choices include decisions about whether or not to stay on in education, which college to go to, what type of course to take, how hard to work for qualifications, whether or not to work part-time, how much time to devote to social activities, and choices about friendships, relationships and careers. It is true that many of these choices are constrained by social circumstances and by locality, but nonetheless, as individualization theorists suggest, at a micro-level young people do face a vast array of options almost daily. Many studies of youth transitions underestimate the degree of choice or agency evident in such processes and there have been few attempts to explain the apparent incompatibility between young people's perceived feelings of autonomy and control and the alleged over-arching often unmediated, influence of 'deterministic' social structures on their lives. Some writers seem to cling to an old socialization model whilst nominally adopting some of the terms featured in the 'new vocabulary' on youth transitions. More work needs to be done to discover and account for the factors which encourage a sense of agency and a belief in choice as important subjective dimensions in young people's attitudes. In this sense the individualization thesis is extremely important in its attempt to seriously consider the theoretical influences of agency as well as structure on youth transitions.

Conclusions

It can be seen from the data presented above that it is not always possible to disentangle agency and structural influences and that contradictions are some-times apparent in the respondents' comments. The following extract from one of the Hanover groups illustrates this point, as the participants try to explain the 'limits'.

Hanover Higher Education Group

A: *I see a lot of possibilities to do anything in my future instead of recoiling from the risks, or, I mean, there is no other way of handling it, is there? If you do not do it, you will come a cropper. It would be really terrible. As I see it, there is not a better and enjoyable time as the time the future will bring and I am looking forward to it already.*

L: *I would like to emphasize what you just said. As a matter of fact, I think that we who are sitting here, having the Abitur in our pockets, there is so much we could do. It is right, a lot of decisions already have been made and maybe there are some limits due to the decisions we have made. The things that are beyond the limits are no business of ours. To summarize, I believe that there is so much that the world holds in store for us that you personally are expected to choose from and organize that we should look forward to it. I see only positive future prospects.*

A: *Yes, I am of the opinion that there was never a time when we had it better.*

L: *Regarding the decades before.... It can only get better.*

Do you think it will get better for all or only for people like you?

A: *Of course, for all. The question was how I see my future prospects, right? It is not only my future. I regard it as a general problem. There is every indication that it will be a positive future, I think.*

E: *Well, I would describe the future with one singe word: demanding. I do have the feeling that there is something demanding and straining; this responsibility of the organization of your life that now lies in your own hands; and also all the temptations and possibilities that are also part of that. So - active but nonetheless very, very exciting and thrilling. It is like, "conquering" something I suppose.*

N: *That is right. Conquering something – I like the idea very much. In fact, I share your opinion. I think that the future will be positive for us, that is, not only for myself but for everybody else too. So, I do not limit it to myself. It is absolutely breathtaking what we can do, what possibilities there are, what we can learn. That is simply terrific! I think it is good.*

This viewpoint, which was fairly typical within the student samples, and those of the unemployed groups discussed earlier, lends support to the notion of structured individualization.

Most respondents attached considerable importance to individual effort and expressed an optimistic belief that if they worked hard and achieved suitable qualifications then they should be able to follow their own independent pathway in adult life. Social connections, forging them and 'making them work for you' as well as the importance of image and self-presentation were much emphasised. But at the same time, comments often contain an

implicit understanding that, when it comes to the 'crunch', individuals are also dependent to an extent on either 'luck' or on general external factors including employers' preferences and recruitment policies and the state of the job market in their particular locality. The importance of economic structures is still there, but it is being re-shaped and re-formed.
The previous study asked whether younger people were simply reconstructing 'fate' as choice (Bates, 1993, p. 30) The indications from the present study are that a much more complex process is involved, which becomes elaborated as structuring contexts of action are experienced.
The next stages of analysis focus on people as social actors within a matrix of nine structuring contexts of action, simultaneously orientated towards past, present and future in the present moment.

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Economic and Social Research Council for their funding of the Major Award Number L 134 251 011, Youth Citizenship and Social Change Programme

Our thanks also go to John Dobby, Senior Statistician, National Foundation for Educational Research and Louise Dartnell of University of Surrey, for their invaluable help in data preparation and analysis.

References

BAETHGE, M. (1989) Individualization as hope and as disaster, in: K. HURRELMANN and. ENGELS (Eds) The Social World of Adolescents: international Perspectives (New York, de Gruyter).

BANKS, M., BATES, I., BREAKWELL, G., BYNNER J., EMLER, N., JAMESON, L. & ROBERTS, K. (1992) Careers and Identities (Milton Keynes, Open University Press).

BATES, I. (1993) A job which is 'right for me'? in: 1. BATES & G. RISEBOROUGH (Eds) Youth and Inequality (Buckingham, Open University Press).

BECK, U. (1992) Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity (London, Sage).

BELL, C. & HOWIESON, C. (1988) The view from the hutch: educational guinea pigs speak about
TVEI, in: D. RAFFE (Ed.) Education and the Youth Labour Market (Lewes, Falmer Press).

BYNNER, J. & ROBERTS, K (Eds) (1991) Youth and Work. Transition to Employment in England and Germany (London, Anglo-German Foundation).

CHURCH, A. & AINLEY, P. (1987) Inner city decline and regeneration: young people and the labour market, in: P. BROWN & D.N. ASHTON (Eds) Education, Unemployment and Labour Markets (Lewes, Falmer Press).

DENSCOMBE, M. (1995) Explorations in group interviews: an evaluation of a reflexive and partisan approach. British Educational Research journal, 21(2), pp. 131-148.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1995) The English Education System: An Overview of Structure and Policy (London, DFEE).

EYANS, K. & FURLONG, A. (1996) Metaphors of youth transition: niches, pathways, trajectories or navigations. Paper presented at Conference on British Youth Research: A New Agenda, University of Glasgow, 26-28 January.

EVANS, K. & HEINZ, W. (1993) Studying forms of transition: methodological innovation in a cross-national study of youth transition and labour market entry in England and Germany, Comparative
Education, 29(2), pp. 145-158.

EVANS, K. & HEINZ, W.R. (Eds) (1994) Becoming Adults in England and Germany (London, Anglo-German Foundation).

EVANS, K. & HEINZ, W. (1995) Flexibility, learning and risk: work, training and early careers in
England and Germany, Education and Training, 37(5), pp. 3-11.

FUR.NJHAM, A. (1991) Youth unemployment: a review of the literature in: D. CORSON (Ed.) Education for Work. Background to Policy and Curriculum (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters/The Open University).

HAMMERSLEY M. (1992) What's Wrong with Ethnography? (London, Routledge).

LEWIS, A. (1992) Group child interviews as a research tool, British Educational Research journal,
18(4), pp. 413-421. 1,

ROBERTS, K. (1995) Youth and Employment in Modern Britain (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

RUDD, P.W. (1996) Structure and agency in youth transitions: student perspectives on vocational further education. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey.

WALLACE, C. (1989) Social reproduction and school leavers: a longitudinal perspective, in: K.HURRELMANN & U. ENCELS (Eds) The Social World of Adolescents: International Perspectives. (New York, de Gruyter).

APPENDIX 2:PROVISIONAL FACTORS

SELF

F1	F2	F3	F4
q17.2.1	q17.1.1	q11.1.3	q16.1 (-)
q17.2.2	q17.1.2	q11.2.3	q16.5 (-)
q17.2.3	q17.1.3	q11.2.4	
q17.2.4	q17.1.4	q11.1.5	
q17.2.5	q17.1.5	q11.1.6	
q17.2.6	q17.1.6		
q26.3 (-)			
q26.4 (-)			
Personal life often positive Good social skills Confident	Working life often positive	Lack of achievement due to lack of skills, lack of qualifications (re ach at work) , and own weaknesses	Career **not** long term goal or interest

CONTROL

F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
q17.2.1	q17.1.1	q24.1	q11.1.3	q16.1	q31.1
q17.2.2	q17.1.2	q24.2	q11.2.3	q16.5	q31.4
q17.2.3	q17.1.3	q24.3	q11.2.4	q16.7 (-)	q31.8
q17.2.4	q17.1.4	q24.4	q11.1.5	myplan	
q17.2.5	q17.1.5	q31.3	q11.1.6	q31.2	
q17.2.6	q17.1.6			q31.10	
Personal life often positive	Working life often positive	Opportunities do NOT depend on gender,race, class, family or where u live	Lack of achievement due to lack of skills, lack of qualifications (re ach at work) , and own weaknesses	Career rel to a long term goal and interest. Chose it. Not chance. Success not chance.	Getting job does **NOT** depend on ability. Talent does not lead to success. Successful people do not usually deserve it.

FUTURE

F1	F2
q30.4	q27
q30.5	q29
q30.6	q30.2
	q30.7 (-)
Unlikely to leave area or country or to learn new language	Unlikely to get job I want. No plans for future. Unlikely to be seeking further qualification Likely to be unemployed

AGENCY

F1	F2	F3	F4
q19.1.2	q30.4	q33.1	q32.8
q19.1.3	q30.5	q33.5	q32.11
q19.1.4	q30.6		q32.12
q19.1.5			
q19.1.6			
q19.1.7			
q19.1.8			
Looked for work in wide variety of ways (apart from careers office).	Unlikely to leave area or country or to learn new language	Attended rally more than once. Discussed politics with family/friends more than once.	In my work :- Want to meet lots of people. Want to contribute to society (as individual and by group effort).

Appendix 1: Grid showing questionnaire returns by age and gender in each area and setting

		Derby	Hannover	Leipzig	totals
Education	M 18-21	26	21	26	73
	M 22-25	22	26	24	72
	F 18-21	33	26	24	83
	F 22-25	19	27	26	72
	totals	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**
Employment	M 18-21	22	25	28	75
	M 22-25	27	20	21	68
	F 18-21	18	29	22	69
	F 22-25	33	26	29	88
	totals	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**
Unemployment	M 18-21	23	24	27	74
	M 22-25	26	23	23	72
	F 18-21	24	28	27	79
	F 22-25	27	25	23	75
	ethnic				
	totals	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**
	Totals by city	**300**	**300**	**300**	**900**